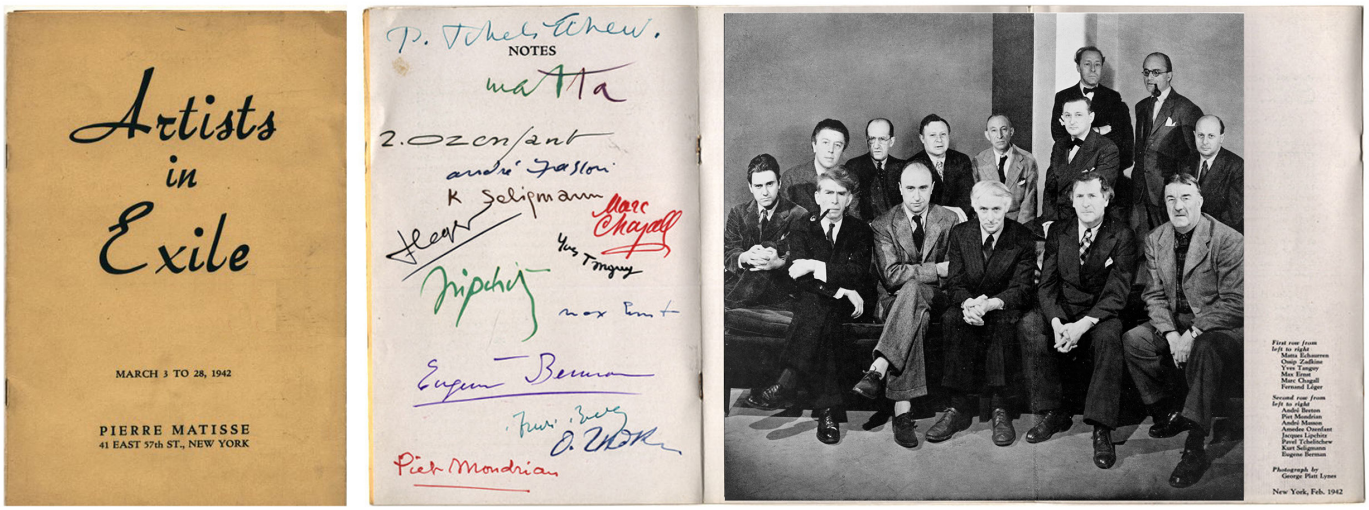


124 A copy of the exhibition catalogue for "Artists in Exile," Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1942, signed by the artists. Private collection.

The Commercial Strategy of the Pierre Matisse Gallery After 1945: Promoting Individual Artists' Careers at the Expense of the Careers of Surrealists

Marianne Jakobi

"Don't scold me too much if I had to lower the prices in Rome substantially."[1] Unlike what we might think, this is not taken from a letter from a dealer to an artist but from a petition by Yves Tanguy to his gallerist Pierre Matisse that immediately raises the issues of the methods used to sell works of art, the works' prices, the rights of foreigners, and so on. Pierre Matisse engenders many questions as he was one of the most distinguished art dealers and gallery owners in the United States and, above all, a key figure in the development of a market for the surrealists.[2]

A famous gallerist, editor of exhibition catalogues, and letter writer, Matisse succeeded in establishing himself on the American art market as the standard-bearer of European—and more specifically Parisian—artists. Among the assorted artists he championed, such as Henri Matisse, Balthus, Jean Dubuffet, and Zao Wou-Ki, there were many surrealists or artists who participated in surrealism. Matisse's particular approach was to focus on the artists themselves, at the expense of supporting the internationalist and revolutionary avant-garde movement that surrealism had been. It was this strategy of promoting personal careers—such as

1 Letter from Yves Tanguy to Pierre Matisse, March 3, 1955, Pierre Matisse Gallery Archives, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (hereafter cited as APML). [All quotations from documents in the APML are own translations.] Having arrived in New York in 1925, Pierre Matisse opened his own gallery in 1931, which he would run until 1989, the year that the gallery's archives were donated to the Pierpont Morgan Library. See the website of the Morgan Library & Museum, which lists all the materials in the archives of the Pierre Matisse Gallery, https://www.themorgan.org/pmg, accessed April 11, 2018.

2 Recent exhibitions and publications have brought up to date the close links between Pierre Matisse and the artists he exhibited in his gallery. See, in particular, John Russell, *Matisse, Father and Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999); Pierre Schneider et al., eds., *Pierre Matisse – Passeur Passionné. Un Marchand d'Art et ses Artistes*, exh. cat. (Paris: Mona Bismarck Foundation, 2005); Charles E. Pierce, ed., *Pierre Matisse and his Artists*, exh. cat. (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 2002); Sabine Rewald, Magdalena Dabrowski, eds., *The American Matisse. The Dealer, His Artists, His Collection. The Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009).

those of Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, Alberto Giacometti, Roberto Matta, and Wifredo Lam—that I would like to analyze here through the study of two types of sources. First, the voluminous correspondence between the gallerist and the surrealist artists, which includes letters, technical notes, and telegrams, but also lists of selected and purchased works, customs declarations, and photographs. These archive documents contain information on the art market (commercial transactions, the organization of exhibitions, and so forth), the genesis of works, and the reactions of the public, collectors, and critics. The other source that offers a better understanding of the gallerist's commercial strategies lies in the exhibition catalogues and the editorial policy Matisse adopted to secure a place for the works of the surrealists on the American scene. All these documents reveal how the market behaved toward the surrealists from the time of their American exile. How did Matisse succeed in becoming the dealer of the surrealists at a time when other galleries were already major players on the New York market? Indeed, from the time Julien Levy's gallery opened in 1931, the American public had been able to see the works of Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, and Max Ernst. The opening of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in 1942, and the exhibition "First Papers of Surrealism" held between October 14 and November 7 of the same year at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion, also raised their profile among the public at large and stimulated growing interest in the market—but on what basis? What types of contract and financial arrangements did Matisse have with each of the five surrealists represented by his gallery? What role did exhibition catalogues play in the reception of these artists in New York in the period following 1945? In order to begin to answer these questions, we should first consider the significance of 1945 as a moment of rupture, or continuity, among artists.

In his book, *Nouveau monde et Nouveau mythe*, Fabrice Flahutez describes the key role played by the galleries owned by Julien Levy and Pierre Matisse for surrealism in the United States from the time of the surrealist artists' American exile.[3] Although Matisse's gallery was involved in the emergence of a surrealist market in America, did it improve the living conditions of its exiled artists? This question was crucial in 1945, when many of the exiles had not received the financial aid from those who had promised them assistance on their arrival in the United States. We know that during World War II, Matisse had opened his gallery to artists in exile, particularly the surrealists. From March 3 to 28, 1942, he mounted a now famous group exhibition whose title may be seen

3 Fabrice Flahutez, *Nouveau monde et nouveau mythe. Mutations du surréalisme, de l'exil américain à l'"Écart Absolu" (1941–1965)* (Dijon: Les Presses du réél, 2007), p. 14.

as taking a political slant in an America that still felt little concerned by the seemingly remote war in Europe.[4] The choice of the title "Artists in Exile" was a strong signal in favor of the grouping of these artists of very diverse practice, as dissimilar as André Breton's *Poème-objet* (*Poem-Object*) from paintings by Piet Mondrian, "abstraction's holy man."[5] This exhibition, which assembled fourteen artists, highlighted the massive presence of surrealists in New York at that time among other exiled artists. Thus, we see in a group photograph taken by George Platt Lynes (fig. 124), from left to right in the first row, Ossip Zadkine seated between Matta and Tanguy, and in the second row, Mondrian between Breton and André Masson. Leaving aside differences in style, generation, and nationality, these artists would meet up in Pierre Matisse's gallery, which provided the surrealists in New York with a place of welcome and a social base throughout the war. In 1945, another group photograph, probably taken in Matisse's apartment after the war had ended, features surrealists like Breton, Matta, and Tanguy. We may wonder why, while assisting the surrealists on a personal level in exhibitions and publications, Matisse never attempted to organize a large-scale surrealist exhibition in which he could have welcomed other artists too.

1945: A surrealist year at the Pierre Matisse Gallery?

In 1945, when Matisse was organizing exhibitions of works by surrealist artists, he enjoyed great prestige among American art lovers. A partner of the American dealer Valentine Dudensing since 1925, in 1931 he opened his own gallery at 41 East Fifty-Seventh Street in the heart of Manhattan, where he presented the works of numerous contemporary artists. The fame of his name (linked with that of his father Henri Matisse) and the quality of his judgment in the creation of his exhibitions ensured his gallery was at the forefront of the New York modern painting scene. However, he was faced with growing competition. An initial appraisal of his activities highlights certain strategic constants in the exhibitions he mounted: from the opening of his gallery to its closure in 1989, Matisse preferred individual shows (out of a total of 207, thirty-seven were dedicated to Joan Miró, seventeen to Marc Chagall, and twelve to Jean Dubuffet) to group exhibitions, which were three times less numerous. These gave the New York public the opportunity to admire a wide range of works by recognized artists—such as Chagall,

4 Pierre Matisse, ed., *Artists in Exile*, exh. cat. (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1942). See texts by James Thrall Soby and Nicolas Calas in this catalogue.

5 Letter from Pierre Matisse to Henri Matisse dated the Sunday before the exhibition preview, March 1, 1942, quoted in Russell, *Matisse, Father and Son* (note 2), p. 201.

Miró, Henri Matisse, Georges Rouault—and those less well known—Theodore Roszak, Stefan Knapp, and Rufino Tamayo. Matisse did not restrict his practice to presenting Western contemporary art, but also embraced that of Africa, Oceania, and pre-Columbian America. These exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues that, initially just lists of work titles, progressively developed to include reproductions of works and above all essays by artists, art critics, and influential intellectuals.

In 1945 Matisse held ten exhibitions in his gallery, half of which were devoted to surrealists. The year opened with "Constellations" (January 9–February 3), the first of two shows dedicated to Miró, in which the series of gouaches painted in 1940–41 was presented alongside ceramics and lithographs, demonstrating the diversity of the techniques practiced by the artist.[6] At the time of the exhibition, Matisse sent Miró a long letter in which he explained his conception of the role of the dealer: "Personally, I can see only one way to be a dealer, and that is to stay friends with the painters"; and of the advantage to the artist not to have to put up with "the worries and obligations that the sale of paintings to different dealers and art lovers engenders."[7] It was with this declaration of friendship, which was not devoid of a degree of self-congratulation by the dealer, that an almost too clear-cut distinction appeared between art market professionals on one hand, and artists and collectors on the other. This same differentiation, which kindles a balance of power, can be seen in relation to another of the gallery's artists, Jean Dubuffet.[8] But, with the success of "Constellations," Miró became the representative of the new European painting praised to the skies by Clement Greenberg, a fact that Matisse did not fail to write to him: "You are therefore doubly concerned, not only for your personal artistic future, but as the most important representative of this European school."[9] It is clear from this just how much Matisse considered surrealism a school of style and not an avant-garde art form. In line with the general thinking in the United States, Matisse was of Greenberg's opinion that formalism appeared as the only destination toward which painting was heading. This was to clearly become the case for almost all of America's artistic and intellectual milieu, and it is this that explains the gallerist's efforts to isolate the

6 Miró, "Constellations," exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, January 9–February 3, 1945. For details, see Fabrice Flahutez, "La genèse des Constellations. Une circulation de sens entre Breton et Miró de 1940 à 1959," in *La Fabrique du titre*, Marianne Jakobi, Pierre-Marc de Biasi, and Laneyrie-Dagen, eds. (Paris: CNRS, 2012), pp. 335–46.

7 Letter from Matisse to Joan Miró, January 17, 1945, APML.

8 On the Pierre Matisse Gallery and the balance of power between the gallerist and Jean Dubuffet, see Marianne Jakobi, "Un Artiste et un Marchand Collectionneurs. Première Lecture de la Correspondance Inédite entre Jean Dubuffet et Pierre Matisse," *Histoire de l'art*, no. 44 (1999), pp. 93–107.

9 Letter from Matisse to Miró, August 16, 1946, APML.

125 Checklist for the March 1945 exhibition of works by Roberto Matta at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. New York, The Morgan Library and Museum.

artists from the groups of which they were members. During "Constellations" in January 1945, correspondence informs us that the works were selling very well ($700 each), and Matisse was delighted with the fact that a longstanding surrealist had visited the exhibition twice and "inspected the gouaches one by one": the artist was Dalí.[10] In the face of this success, Matisse organized a second exhibition, of lithographs, the following month, from February 5 to 25. His interest in the surrealists became stronger every day, despite his avoidance of mounting a group exhibition about which he felt less sure of maintaining control. Yet putting on solo shows was at the very least equally daring and risky as the question of personal promotion among the surrealists had been proscribed in Breton's Surrealist Manifesto of 1924. That did not prevent him, however, from presenting paintings by Matta from March 12 to 31, 1945, under the title "Matta/Paintings, 1944–1945" (fig. 125). It included

10 Matisse to Miró, February 2, 1945, APML.

the very large *Xpace and the Ego* (1945, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris), which he had repainted at the request of Breton in particular, who had considered it too little consonant with surrealist poetics. Even so, Matisse offered him $150 a month to take all of his production; this compares unfavorably with the $200 a month that Peggy Guggenheim was paying Breton to advise her on her art purchases.[11]

In spring 1945, another surrealist was put in the spotlight in the Pierre Matisse Gallery. From May 8 to June 2, it was the turn of Yves Tanguy, while during the winter an exhibition of recent paintings was dedicated to Wifredo Lam. This show coincided with the artist's arrival in Haiti, and preceded exhibitions that were held in the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince and in the Galerie Pierre in Paris a year later. Thus, the year 1945 represented an undertaking by Matisse on behalf of the surrealists, at least Lam, Matta, Miró, and Tanguy, and one that the gallerist wished to continue. This succession of exhibitions is interesting and prompts the question of whether the facility with which Matisse took these artists under contract was not in fact due to the contemporary disintegration of the group and to the distance that Breton put between himself and his former friends, whose personal directions and decisions fell apart during the difficult years of exile.

Miró, the star of the Pierre Matisse Gallery

During the interwar years, while Dalí personified surrealism on the American art scene, Matisse championed another surrealist. Miró was the artist to whom he devoted the greatest number of one-man shows, offering him two per year almost every year. Matisse had been highly enthusiastic about Miró's painting since 1932 and implemented what would become the distinctive aspect of his practice as a dealer: he favored a contract that allowed him to hold the exclusive rights of representation in the United States and first choice of the artist's production. This method was the opposite of the traditional commission-based selling of a work of art, of visiting sales rooms, and of the placement of works on deposit in a gallery. For Matisse, this type of contract had above all the advantage of eliminating any competitors, meaning that he could avoid having to do business with other dealers with whom he would have had to share his rather disorganized accounts, while, conversely, guaranteeing his artist financial security. In order to analyze exactly the reality of the right to be the first to see a new work, to refuse certain works, to make a possible specific payment depending on the type of painting

11 Flahutez, *Nouveau monde* (note 3), p. 14.

126 Advertisement for the March–April 1959 exhibition of works by Joan Miró at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. New York, The Morgan Library and Museum.

(based on its dimensions and materials), and to compare the regularity of payments by their dealers, it would be fascinating to make a comparative study of the links between Miró and his other dealers. As Miró's dealer in New York in the 1930s, Matisse succeeded in making him one of the stars of his gallery (fig. 126). Convinced of the artist's potential, in a letter dated March 3, 1935, written to his father, Matisse said, "I sold a small Miró yesterday, which makes the 12th—little by little the critics will end up admitting that he has talent."[12] As well as this not insignificant question for a dealer, the extract clearly demonstrates the interest Matisse had in the Catalan painter's output. In 1938, Matisse sent Miró $165 a month in exchange for two-thirds of his production, and he did not hesitate to take serious risks by getting money to him in Catalonia

12 Letter from Pierre Matisse to Henri Matisse, March 3, 1935, APML.

during the occupation. Later, from 1945 to his death in 1989, Matisse devoted twenty-seven solo exhibitions to Miró. His understanding of the role of the dealer also broadly took into account the importance of generating publicity and communications through the American press. The gallerist was always sure to invite many critics and key figures in the art world to exhibition previews.

Rivalries between dealers

Following the success of January's exhibition, Matisse organized another, of lithographic works, from February 5 to 25, 1945 (also titled "Constellations").[13] In August 1946, he made Miró the proposition of buying everything the artist had produced between 1942 and 1946, then to sign a two-year contract (1947–49), while Pierre Loeb, who had been his dealer since 1925, would become his representative in France.[14]

The logistical support that Matisse developed to establish Miró's production in New York was only achieved with difficulty, and not without more or less intentional hindrances created by the dealers Pierre Loeb and Aimé Maeght in Paris. Certain issues were raised, such as the exclusivity of rights and the conformity of tariffs, sales price, and purchase price of the works. Matisse's letters demonstrate his irritation at Loeb, who sold works to Americans at large international events like the Venice Biennale. But this did not prevent the pair from reaching agreement at the start of the 1950s to oppose the painter's demand for an increase. On January 28, 1952, Matisse wrote to Miró, "Following a comparison with previous prices, it seems to us that the increase in the purchase price of these paintings is rather sudden and would risk unfavorably influencing first collectors, then speculators."[15] This is valuable information for understanding Matisse's sales strategy, which clearly differentiates two types of potential buyers: on one hand a category that would have no interest in financial speculation, and, on the other, those motivated by nothing else. The extract from the letter also reveals that Matisse believed that any signs of change in the supply and demand of Miró's work would first become visible in the behavior of the painter's

13 "Constellations," New York, Pierre Matisse Gallery, February 5–25, 1945.

14 "Please be kind enough to confirm that as of April 1, 1934, onward, and for a period of one year, I will turn over all of my output to you for *two thousand francs* (2,000 frs.) per month; you will share this output with Pierre Loeb, who will retain *one quarter* as against your share of *three quarters*. … At the end of this first year, the contract may be renewed from year to year, subject to three months' notice on either side. As of April 1, 1935, I reserve the right to increase Pierre Loeb's share in my output to 50%, if that is his wish." Letter from Joan Miró to Pierre Matisse, November 5, 1933. See Russell, *Matisse, Father and Son* (note 2), p. 119.

15 Matisse to Miró, January 28, 1952, APML.

collectors. The impact as envisaged by Matisse of an increase in the sales price of works of art demonstrates the complexity of the art market and the difficulty of understanding how it really functions. Whereas on this occasion Matisse managed to avoid raising the price he paid Miró for his works, which would have necessitated increasing the gallery price in agreement with Loeb, his rivalry with his colleagues in general was often antagonistic. For example, the rapport between the two dealers grew acrimonious when Matisse wrote to Loeb on November 19, 1947, to say, "[W]hat you suggest offers all the advantages of a contract—including first choice of the production—but without the responsibilities that this implies. There is no reason for me to be burdened alone with all the responsibility of such a contract with Miró."[16] Faced by the growing difficulties between Matisse and Loeb, the latter preferred to renounce his function as Miró's dealer in Paris, while Matisse kept his exclusivity on sales in the United States.

Artistic techniques difficult to sell

Correspondence reveals specific disagreements over the sale of ceramics in the United States: this technique aroused differing reactions in the artist and his dealer. On January 17, 1945, Miró wrote that he hoped to sell his large vases for $1,300 and the smaller ones for $900 each.[17] Despite the success of "Constellations," the ceramics could only be sold with difficulty. A year later, on February 2, 1946, the gallerist asked Miró if he would be willing to lower his prices, respectively to $750 and $600. In his reply, Miró tried to persuade Matisse by reminding him that "although ceramics may not generally fall within the province of a picture dealer, they are a very beautiful form of art, and one with which it is possible to do very good business."[18] Matisse cannot have been very convincing to potential buyers as a few months later, on June 8, 1946, he informed the painter that he could not include the ceramics in their contract, and two years later, on June 2, 1948, stated, "I have already told you that, in order to encourage their sale, I will only take 10% in commission. … It should also be borne in mind that this type of object is not easy to sell."[19] The medium of ceramics shows just how much Matisse's philanthropic nature needs to be put into perspective. He was first and foremost a dealer and the praise he showered on Miró in all their correspondence was above all for the artist's works and, specifi-

16 Matisse to Loeb, November 19, 1947, APML.
17 Which would respectively represent about €15,000 and €11,000 in 2018 values.
18 Matisse to Miró, February 2, 1946, APML.
19 Matisse to Miró, June 2, 1948, APML.

cally, the medium that sold easily, that is to say, painting. Ceramics also raised the question of the authorship of works produced in partnership. Who was the creator, the painter, or the ceramist? "The agreements that you have with Artigas have been piled on top of those between us and it seems to me that these works fall into the sphere represented by our contract,"[20] wrote Matisse, inasmuch as he considered that the only thing that counted was the invention of the forms, for which Miró was responsible. In other words, from a legal standpoint, the dealer was defending the idea of the conception of a piece over its creation.

Engraving, like pottery, also caused disagreement between the two men. Between 1954 and 1961, their correspondence bears out that the gallerist's stock of engravings by Miró was difficult to shift in a market that was little propitious to prints, and even more so for the artist's ceramic wares, which did not seem to hold the attention of the American public.[21] Whereas huge ceramic wall panels were ordered by UNESCO in Paris in 1957–58, by the World's Fair in Osaka, by Barcelona Airport in 1970, and by the Kunsthaus in Zurich in 1971, no order was forthcoming in the United States.

Nonetheless, Matisse succeeded in establishing Miró's reputation on the art scene in America. For example, in 1947, when the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris acquired its first "Miró" thanks to a gift from the artist and Loeb, Matisse had already "placed" works by the surrealist painter in important museums and private collections.[22] The reception given by the American public to Miró's oeuvre partly contributed to his success and indirectly to his recognition at the 1954 Venice Biennale, where he was awarded the Grand Prize for engraving. It was the result, said Matisse, of "more than twenty years of devoted collaboration."[23]

Artists in exile: A growth market?

Although Miró's works were a sure source of income for Pierre Matisse before and after World War II, the gallerist took the risk of opening his gallery to other artists, in particular the surrealists in exile. In Tanguy's case, relations between the two went way back. They met at high school, the Lycée Montaigne in Paris, lost sight of one another, and

20 Matisse to Miró, May 26, 1956, APML.

21 Which is curious given that Miró won the Grand Prize for engraving at the Venice Biennale in 1954.

22 The first work by Miró to enter the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris was *The Bull Race* (*La Course de taureaux*) (October 8, 1945), oil on canvas, 114 × 144 cm. Gift of the artist and Pierre Loeb, 1947, inv. AM 2763 P.

23 Matisse to Miró, May 26, 1956, APML.

then met again at the exhibition "Objets surréalistes" at the Galerie Charles Ratton. Then, in 1939, Tanguy wrote to Matisse to say that he was intending to leave France for New York. Three months after his arrival, the gallerist mounted his first exhibition of Tanguy's work and offered the painter a regular income in return for a part of his production[24]. After this first exhibition at the Matisse Gallery, a process of institutionalization of Tanguy's painting began: his works were shown in American museums in Connecticut (the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford), in Chicago (the Arts Club of Chicago), and on the West Coast (San Francisco Museum of Art). During the years Yves Tanguy spent in the United States,[25] his correspondence was often related to business matters. One letter is particularly enlightening on his financial relationship with Matisse, and on the rate at which his paintings were finding sales. As from January 1948, Matisse proposed to share the income from each sale "equally after having established a price list together." The substitution of monthly payments by commissions was less demanding for Matisse, as the prices that Tanguy commanded—as their correspondence indicates—rose almost 500% between 1940 and 1946. This commercial proposition put an end to the "arrangement" that "was a form of protection that allowed the dealer not to reveal a lack of sales (the usual self-respect), and the painter not to worry about a slow rate of flow."[26] The letter from which this extract is taken then discusses the difficulties faced by a gallerist in times of slow sales: "After all, I see no reason why the artist should not share the dealer's worries when the paintings are not selling. Perhaps that would help him forget his own."[27] Had Matisse previously offered Tanguy a sum of money in exchange for works as he had done for Miró? What is certain is that Tanguy enjoyed a certain freedom to sell his work abroad. In 1953, he told Matisse of the sales he had recently made: "Sold *Construire, détruire* in Rome to Professor Lionello de Lisi of Genoa—you probably know him—good collection—for $1200," and apologized for having had to "lower the prices."[28] This letter clearly demonstrates the margin of freedom Tanguy employed in selling his own works abroad even though Matisse was his regular dealer. In Tanguy's case, the business relationship with his dealer shifted from a monthly payment to a commission on sales.

24 Isabelle Dervaux, "Tanguy en Amérique: Réception et Fortune Critique," in André Cariou, ed., *Yves Tanguy. L'univers surréaliste*, exh. cat. (Quimper: Musée des Beaux-Arts; Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya; Paris: Somogy, 2007), p. 177.

25 André Cariou, "L'exil américain, 1940–1946," in ibid., pp. 170–75.

26 Matisse to Tanguy, December 10, 1947, APML.

27 Ibid.

28 Tanguy to Matisse, March 3, 1955, APML.

With regard to Roberto Matta, Matisse wanted to exhibit his work in 1942, following the closure of the Julien Levy Gallery and the group exhibition "Artists in Exile" that he organized in his own gallery. It also seems that Matisse proposed giving Matta a monthly sum in return for all the artist's work, but to no avail.[29] From March 12 to 31, 1945, Matta's works were on show in the Pierre Matisse Gallery under the title "Matta/Paintings, 1944–1945." Although the gallerist mounted five exhibitions of Matta's work between 1942 and 1947, Matta was the surrealist artist with whom his links halted most quickly, just before Matta left for Chile. The impression given is that, between them, the pair were unable to hit it off.

It was also in 1942 that Lam, at Breton's recommendation, joined the artists represented by the Matisse Gallery: "After having thought it over and particularly on account of your advice, and of your description of Pierre Matisse as a friend, I am in agreement with you to make this sacrifice and I have resolved on him, while hoping that you may be able to make him raise the price so I can improve my working conditions."[30] Breton defended the painting of his friend and brother in misfortune, with whom he had embarked on the *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle* in March 1941 to travel to the United States via Martinique with André Masson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Victor Serge. Hardly had Lam arrived in Cuba after a twenty-year absence than he began painting with gouaches, given that he did not have the means to buy oils. Matisse then offered to pay Lam thirty dollars for each gouache[31] at a time when Lam was still not yet known. Increasingly intrigued by the gouaches that Lam sent him from Havana, Matisse quickly raised his prices and sent a check for $250 instead of the $180 promised. He also proposed that the gouaches in the next exhibition should remain in his possession except for those that he sold, while also paying seventy-five dollars for each sale.[32] In exchange for this very real assistance to Lam, Matisse asked for the exclusive sales right: "On your side, you give me the right of representation for your gouaches and the right of first sight on new works."[33] This indication that a change had taken place in their contractual relations is borne out by another source. In a letter to Breton, Lam states, "After having received my first batch, Matisse offered me $75 for each gouache sold out of the 40 that belong to me, also that he should be my sole

29 Schneider et al., *Pierre Matisse – Passeur Passionné* (note 2), p. 178.

30 Letter from Wifredo Lam to André Breton, July 1, 1942, APML.

31 "I commit to putting on an exhibition of your gouaches in my gallery and to immediately buying outright a set of ten gouaches of the same size as those you sent to Mr. Breton for a sum of three hundred dollars." Letter from Matisse to Lam, July 10, 1942, APML.

32 "I propose to put gouaches from Group A at $75, as was agreed in our previous letters." Letter from Matisse to Lam, November 11, 1942, APML.

33 Letter from Matisse to Lam, September 18, 1942, APML.

representative for my gouaches in the United States and to give me a second exhibition of gouaches in 1943, definitely buying 10 from me for $500. He's paying me $100 more for the 10 selected for the exhibition from November 17 to December 5, 1942."[34] The gallerist then agreed to increase the prices and above all not to change them while organizing his exhibitions. The rest of the letter is of great interest because it reveals that Matisse created a hierarchy to choose Lam's works:

> "[On] 11 November, after receiving the second batch, which, due to his demand for variation, is composed differently, he offered me a classification (that he said was agreed with you and Barr) of 50 gouaches in three groups. A: the group of 20 gouaches of which 10 go to him, 10 to me, and for which he will pay me $75 for each one sold, as in his letter of 18 September. Then, Group B, which contains 23 gouaches that he wants to offer as sketches, or colored drawings, and for which he will pay me $40 for each sale. Group C containing the 7 others is entirely rejected."[35]

Matisse defined the price of works on the basis of his perception of their value, taking into consideration that the gouaches in Group B, in particular, allowed him to encourage customer loyalty by means of a gift. The commercial ties between the gallerist and Lam were therefore reliant on the sale of works. This was the reason why Lam regularly opposed Matisse, suggesting they draw up "a little contract" instead of relying on "risky and irregular sales."[36] Lam then concentrated on his large manifesto painting *The Jungle*, which measures 240 centimeters high by 225 wide (94¼ × 90½ inches) and features totemic figures. The canvas was exhibited at the second Lam exhibition at the Matisse Gallery but it found no buyer and the commercially disappointing show prompted the gallerist to suspend his dealings with Lam, an act that once again shows the real value of the "words of affection" he addressed here and there in letters to his artists. But in March 1945 Lam received a check from the gallerist for $441 and, at the end of April, Matisse informed him that *The Jungle* had been sold to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Following an exchange of letters whose main subject was financial demands, Matisse's reply was quick to arrive: "After all the complications, the acquisition of this picture by this museum is of the

34 I have Fabrice Flahutez to thank for this reference. Letter from Wifredo Lam to André Breton, January 22, 1942, Fonds Breton, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

35 Ibid. The "sale" referred to is of gouaches in Group A, for which the gouaches in Group B were offered as inducements.

36 Matisse to Lam, July 26, 1943, APML.

greatest importance and may lead to other good things in the future."[37] In 1946, while staying in New York, where he met Pierre Matisse, Lam turned to the London Gallery, a British bastion of surrealism.[38] His works were later exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and in Havana at the first solo exhibition dedicated to his art shortly after his departure from Haiti.[39] However, Matisse continued to show Lam's work: for his fourth solo exhibition at the gallery included *Hermès Trismégiste* (1945) and some of the *Canaïma* series alongside a Kota reliquary and a Kanak roof spire. The juxtaposition of the painter's works with tribal art prompted Lam to adopt a "primitivist" vision. In parallel to the painter's recognition in Cuba, the United States, in Europe (Great Britain, Belgium, Sweden, France), and Japan, Matisse gave the artist four other exhibitions, of which the last took place in Lam's lifetime, in June 1982, presenting a choice of "Early Works, 1942 to 1951." Thus, with regard to these artists in exile, the gallerist established relations of varying length on the basis of contracts that were relatively less favorable to the artists that one might have thought: for a monthly stipend for Tanguy and Matta in exchange for all of their production, and for irregular payments to Lam based on sales of his works. As part of these tacit contracts, the organization of exhibitions complemented by catalogues was a powerful argument to convince the artists to remain with his gallery and to develop a market of collectors/buyers of the works of these surrealist artists.

The exhibition catalogue as an advertising strategy

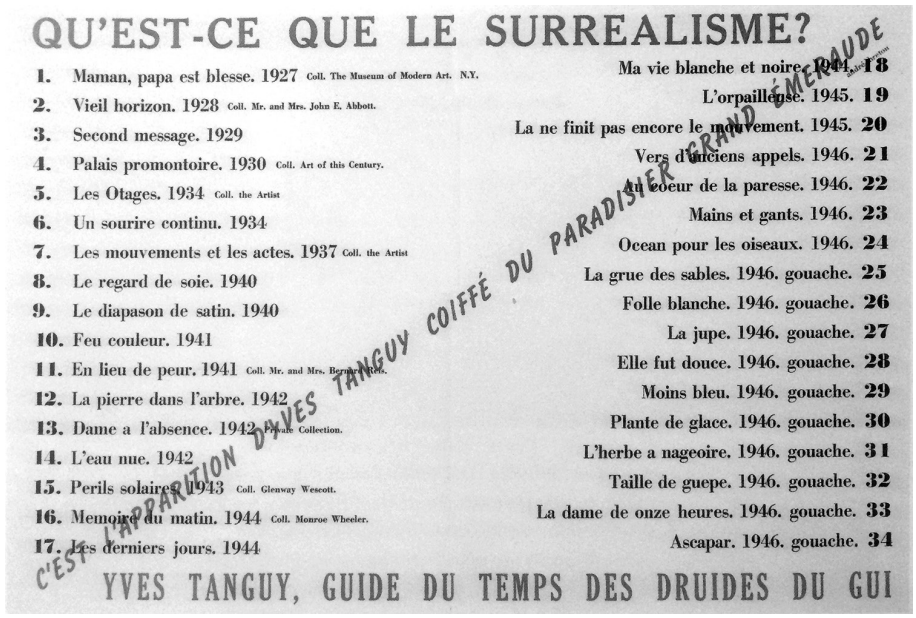
With the aim of reaching a specific and cultivated public with an appreciation of European art, particularly art that bore the cachet of Paris, and who were therefore potential buyers, Matisse placed great value on exhibition catalogues. To match what he supposed were the expectations of the public and of the artist presented, he focused either on the surrealist dimension, as with Tanguy, or on the individual trajectory of an artist, as he did with Giacometti, who was then viewed through the prism of existentialism.

The catalogue of the exhibition "Yves Tanguy. Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings, Gouaches and Drawings, 1927–1946," held from

37 Matisse to Lam, May 25, 1945, APML.

38 See the thesis by Caterina Caputo, "Collezionare, Esporre, Vendere. Strategie di Mercato e Divulgazione dell'Arte Surrealista tra il 1938 e il 1950. Il Caso della London Gallery," under the supervision of Alessandro Nigro, Florence University.

39 Matthew Gale, "Offshore 1946–1952," in Catherine David, ed., *Wifredo Lam*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2015), pp. 36–45.



127 Checklist for the November 1946 exhibition of works by Yves Tanguy at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. New York, The Morgan Library and Museum.

November 5 to 30, 1946, made direct reference to the surrealist movement with this question written in capital letters (fig. 127): "What is surrealism?" And the reply: "It's the appearance of Yves Tanguy wearing on his head the large emerald-green bird of paradise."[40] Tanguy was the only surrealist artist exhibited at the Matisse Gallery to be directly associated with Breton's movement in the exhibition catalogues.[41] However, this incursion of surrealism remained a one-off event in the gallerist's catalogues and correspondence.[42]

40 Quotation previously published in André Breton, ed., Documents 34, no. 2 (Brussels, 1934).

41 This was already the case for the exhibition "Yves Tanguy" (November 5–30, 1946) at the Matisse Gallery, for which the catalogue assembled all of Breton's writings on Tanguy, and the layout was arranged by Duchamp on almost one hundred pages illustrated with thirty-eight paintings and twenty-one drawings, the limited edition featuring originals (either etchings or drawings).

42 If we are to believe a letter written to Jean Cassou, the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the gallerist considered Tanguy as an individual and no longer as one of the members of the surrealists. Hence, Pierre Matisse offered Cassou the gift of *The Palace of the Windowed Rocks* (*Palais aux rochers des fenêtres*), 1942, one "of his best works if not the most important." Matisse wrote, "You have learned of the premature death of the painter Yves Tanguy, one of the purest figures of the last thirty years, and, owing to the general stampede of the public, enflamed by their attempts to outdo each other, allowed to fall into oblivion, neglected and unrecognized. I firmly believe that a reversal will soon occur, which, moreover, is beginning to make itself felt." Letter from Pierre Matisse to Jean Cassou, quoted in the catalogue *Yves Tanguy. L'univers surréaliste*, André Cariou (note 24).

In Giacometti's case, by publishing the artist's writings, Matisse conceived a type of catalogue that was to become the gallery's trademark. The catalogue of the first solo exhibition dedicated to Giacometti offers an excellent illustration of the phenomenon.[43] Matisse deflected the proclamatory value of surrealist writings by erasing the social and political component of creation by means of a request for a purely biographical text and a formal description of the sculptures.[44] In the manuscript hand-illustrated by the artist, which has a mnemonic function, the drawings provide a means to associate, inventory, and record sculptures already made by the artist. Published in the catalogue of the 1948 exhibition, this text includes deletions, crossings out, and corrections that illustrate the writing process. Some of the drawings of sculptures made from memory stimulated Giacometti to add comments, for example: "[T]hese two objects are very slender in profile." So as to be able to retranscribe the effect of "transparent construction," he made "cages with constructions empty on the inside." In addition to this didactic aspect meant for a specific public, one that he was attempting to create, the gallerist made a doubly strategic editorial decision: by adding Jean-Paul Sartre's manifesto text "La Recherche de l'Absolu" also published in *Les Temps Modernes*,[45] he showed on one hand the importance of his star artist defended by one of the most influential intellectuals in Paris, and, on the other, he revealed to the American public Giacometti's existentialist rather than surrealist dimension. This manner of propelling American visitors to the gallery into the artist's creative process was repeated in the catalogue to Giacometti's second solo exhibition in the Matisse Gallery.[46] Once again, this emphasis on the artist's work seems to have responded to a specific expectation of the American public. At the same moment, Thomas Hess, who defended the work of artists like Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, David Smith, and Ad Reinhardt, also chose to focus on the writings of artists and to shed light on the creative process, in particular through the magazine *ARTnews*. The

43 Although Pierre Matisse and Giacometti both attended the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in the early 1920s and their age and training were similar, they did not write to one another until 1936, and only met much later. The catalogue is from the "Alberto Giacometti Exhibition of Sculptures, Paintings and Drawings" held at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, January 19–February 21, 1948.

44 In 1937, Pierre Matisse presented his first work by Giacometti, *Woman Walking* (*Femme qui marche*), in his gallery beside works by Brancusi, Gris, Picasso, Miró, Bonnard, Maillol, and Despiau.

45 Jean-Paul Sartre, "La recherche de l'absolu," in *Les Temps modernes*, no. 28 (1948), reprinted in *Situations III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 289–305.

46 Dated "Stampa, 28 XII 50," this text was published accompanied by "*petits écrits*" and drawings addressed to Pierre Matisse for preparation of the catalogue of the exhibition "Sculptures, Paintings and Drawings," held December 21 to 31, 1950, at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. Quoted in Michel Leiris and Jacques Dupin, eds., *Alberto Giacometti. Écrits* (Paris: Hermann, 1997), pp. 51–63.

tack taken was very much to raise the awareness of the public of the production of the artist, who had been put in the spotlight by reviews and exhibition catalogues. In Matisse's case, the commercial stakes were substantial, as he was also promoting himself by making public his written exchanges with his artists, who, like Giacometti, used them as an opportunity to discuss artistic experimentation. This astonishing catalogue, featuring facsimiles of drawings and an extract from a letter, also makes it possible to understand the value and function given to titles:

> "So, if I want to give a title that is more than just a simple indication (for example, place I, II and III, or Composition I, II and III, or others of the same type), it would be necessary to add a little explanation for each sculpture and stick it on! Something that wouldn't be all that bad and which I have already thought about several times"[47]

Thus, the catalogues at the Pierre Matisse Gallery shifted between being archive documents, works of art, and forms of advertising. From the standpoint of the art market, the invention of these catalogues by Pierre Matisse brought his gallery significant added value.

In fine, Pierre Matisse hosted many and regular solo exhibitions in his gallery: dedicated to Matta until 1947, to Tanguy until 1963, to Giacometti until 1964, to Lam until 1982, and to Miró until 1987. His correspondence reveals that his commercial strategies were more honed to match the characteristics of the artist in question—his methods of production, his celebrity in the United States—than they were a general policy for purchasing works from artists. Matisse thus chose to build up the reputation of an artist by concentrating on his unique qualities and avoiding the political dimension of the surrealist group. In this way, he made himself the gallerist of certain surrealists without ever becoming the gallerist of surrealism.

47 Ibid.